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Letter dated 4 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward to you the concept note for the ministerial-level open debate of the Security Council on conflict prevention and sustaining peace that will be held on 10 January 2017 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
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Annex to the letter dated 4 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the open debate of the Security Council to be held on 10 January 2017 on the subject "Conflict prevention and sustaining peace"

Introduction

A new Secretary-General is taking office at a time when the United Nations is faced with a multitude of complex challenges to peace and security. The need for a United Nations that can fully deliver on the promise of its Charter to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" is perhaps greater than ever.

Over the past few years, there has been a strong call at the United Nations for a renewed emphasis on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. The reviews carried out in 2015 on the peace and security architecture and recent resolutions have underscored the urgent need to put prevention at the core of the Organization's work, in accordance with the Charter. The Secretary-General has identified a "surge in diplomacy for peace" as a priority of his term in office.

Sweden will hold a ministerial-level open debate of the Security Council on 10 January 2017 on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. This debate will provide a platform for setting out how best to place the maintenance of peace at the heart of United Nations engagement and to discuss ways to improve the collective ability to maintain peace and security. The debate will offer the Secretary-General the opportunity to set out his vision for a renewed emphasis on prevention, and Member States will be able to discuss how the Council can best support the sustaining peace agenda.

While effective prevention must draw upon and be a priority for all entities across all pillars of the United Nations system, a close and proactive working relationship between the Secretary-General and the Security Council is at the heart of the Organization's ability to take early action and facilitate peaceful solutions. The tools are available in the Charter, specifically Chapter VI. What is needed is a new political consensus in support of prevention and a commitment to policies and actions that prevent conflicts before they begin.

Context: a renewed call for conflict prevention at the United Nations

The determination to "take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace" is enshrined in the Charter. Today, the world is seeing more and increasingly complex violent conflicts than it has seen in many decades, leaving in their wake unprecedented levels of displacement and human suffering. The United Nations is currently facing the largest number of simultaneous security and humanitarian crises since its establishment. Notwithstanding its mandate to prevent the outbreak of conflict and engage at an early stage to prevent escalation, the scale of the current challenges has resulted in a Security Council that is seized primarily with addressing the crises of the day rather than preventing the conflicts of tomorrow. In recent deliberations, the Council has recognized that the

tools in the Charter, "which can be used for conflict prevention, have not been fully utilized" (resolution 2171 (2014)) and expressed its "determination to pursue the objective of prevention of armed conflict as an integral part of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" (ibid.).

A central finding of all the reviews of the peace and security architecture of the United Nations was the need for a greater focus on prevention across all stages of conflicts. In its report (A/70/95-S/2015/446), the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations emphasized the primacy of politics, noting that "lasting peace is achieved not through military and technical engagements, but through political solutions". One of three fundamental changes highlighted in the subsequent implementation report of the Secretary-General (A/70/357-S/2015/682) was the need to prioritize prevention and mediation in order to break the cycle of responding too late and too expansively. In the global study on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), it was noted that "prevention of conflict must be the priority, not the use of force". In addition, the need for both short-term preventive measures and measures to address the root causes and structural drivers of conflict was stressed in the report. The need for a more comprehensive approach and systematic preventive measures to address the drivers of violent extremism is also captured in the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

In his report for the World Humanitarian Summit (A/70/709), the Secretary-General presented "political leadership to prevent and end conflicts" as a core responsibility, emphasizing that "an end to human suffering requires political solutions, unity of purpose and sustained leadership and investment in peaceful and inclusive societies".

The underresourcing of conflict prevention has been recognized in a range of studies. While the international community invests heavily in responding to crisis through peacekeeping operations and humanitarian response, it spends only a fraction of that amount on prevention. Increased investments in prevention could prevent conflict from occurring in the first place, saving lives and money and protecting development gains.

The sustaining peace resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly (resolutions 2282 (2016) and 70/262, respectively) represent a normative and conceptual shift at the United Nations. By endorsing the new concept of "sustaining peace", the Council and the Assembly call for a long-term, comprehensive approach to sustaining peace to be brought forward in all United Nations engagements before, during and after conflict and emphasize the need for the United Nations to move from a linear approach to addressing conflict to a continuous, cross-pillar and cross-sectoral approach to prevention. In these resolutions, "sustaining peace" means "activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development". The agenda shifts the focus to a more proactive, inclusive, nationally owned and nationally driven strategy to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict.

The sustaining peace framework shares commonalities with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Both contain an emphasis on national ownership,

universality, inclusivity, people-centred and transformative approaches and a call for coherent implementation across the three United Nations pillars of human rights, peace and security and development. The Secretary-General acknowledged the interlinkages between the root causes of conflict, poverty, inequality, human rights violations and environmental destruction in his vision statement, commenting that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is a "key prevention tool".

In addition to the use of Chapter VI tools for prevention, several of the reviews of United Nations peace and security present arguments for systemic tools to deal with transnational risks, including trafficking in person, the narcotics trade and arms smuggling and the effects of climate change. Enhanced capacity to analyse risks and better linking of existing tools would improve the capability of the Security Council and the United Nations system as a whole to prevent armed conflict. The reviews also contain proposals for the greater use of structural prevention tools to respond to broad and overarching prevention challenges, such as investing in institutional capacity-building, security sector reform and good governance. The reviews also contain recommendations for deeper partnerships with regional and subregional organizations in conflict prevention efforts.

Taken together, there is therefore a strong convergence on the need for a collective political and financial recommitment to prevention and for renewed efforts to make conflict prevention central to the work across the United Nations system. Responding to this need would strengthen the ability of the United Nations to deliver on its original vision and primary responsibility of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

Objectives of the debate and issues to be addressed

A number of normative developments over the past two years have generated momentum for greater prevention efforts across the Organization. With incoming new Secretary-General who has highlighted prevention as one of his priorities, these normative developments could lead to a real shift in how the United Nations addresses peace and security challenges. The open debate will help to identify challenges to more effective preventive action and propose steps to overcome them. The aim is a more proactive form of cooperation between the Security Council and the Secretary-General, with a view to enabling more strategic responses.

At the open debate, the Secretary-General will have the opportunity to outline his vision for prioritizing prevention and how he would like to cooperate with the Security Council in this endeavour. Council members will have the opportunity to provide political support for the vision of the Secretary-General and express their commitment to using the prevention tools available to the Council.

To help to guide the debate, Member States are encouraged to consider the following questions:

(a) What steps should be taken to ensure more effective conflict prevention by the Security Council and across the wider United Nations system?

(b) Which operational, systemic and structural prevention tools are available to the Council and how can it better use them in preventing conflict and sustaining peace?

(c) What can be done to enhance the working relationship between the Council and the Secretary-General to increase the focus on prevention?

(d) How can the Council and Member States provide the political leadership necessary to fully capitalize on the opportunities for preventive action and to take forward the sustaining peace agenda?